

# Making It Easier For Everyone To Make It

An Interview with Kiersten Barnet, Executive Director, New York Jobs CEO Council

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kiersten Barnet is the Executive Director of the New York Jobs CEO Council, a nonprofit membership intermediary focused on scaling market-driven workforce development solutions. Barnet previously spent 15 years at Bloomberg, most recently leading Bloomberg's Gender-Equality Index (GEI) and reporting framework. She and her team successfully influenced hundreds of the largest companies around the world to measure and report new social sustainability metrics and enhanced the investment community's ability to direct capital in a way that aligns with clients' values. Skilled at publicly advancing a mission, Barnet has spoken at global stages including Davos and the New Economy Forum and was the host of Bloomberg's on-camera interview series "Invested in Equality." She is a member of the Women's Forum of New York and is the co-founder and former steering chair of the U.S. 30 percent Club, a group of influential CEOs, including Warren Buffett and Larry Fink, committed to diversifying U.S. boardrooms. Barnet currently serves on the board of directors of CareerWise New York, Washington and Lee Williams School Board of Advisors.



Kiersten Barnet

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The New York Jobs CEO Council ([nyjobsceocouncil.org](http://nyjobsceocouncil.org)) was founded in 2020 by the CEOs of New York City's largest private sector employers to solve for growing income and opportunity gaps. As an intermediary organization, the council is charged with

building a workforce and education system that puts every New Yorker on a pathway to a family-sustaining career. The Jobs Council knows that by leveraging the power of the collective, it can more effectively bridge gaps between industry, education, government, and community. The council of CEOs, including Jamie Dimon, Sundar Pichai, and Jane Fraser, are committed to hiring 100,000 low-income New Yorkers into family-sustaining jobs by 2030, including 25,000 CUNY graduates. The Jobs Council's 27 member companies have hired 52,000 low-income New Yorkers into living-wage jobs at their companies over the past four years, including nearly 10,000 recent CUNY graduates.

## Will you discuss your career journey?

I spent most of the first 15 years of my career at Bloomberg. Bloomberg was a great place to grow up professionally because it's a global organization where if you're willing to work hard and stretch yourself, there are endless opportunities. During my time at Bloomberg, I had the opportunity to travel to nearly 40 countries to meet with colleagues and clients. These experiences taught me that exceptional companies are built by exceptional people – and the importance of having access to a skilled local talent pool. While at Bloomberg, I founded the U.S. Chapter of the 30 percent Club, a coalition of CEOs committed to diversifying U.S. boardrooms. At the time, just over 16 percent of S&P 500 directors were women and, while there were a lot of individual efforts

popping up around the country tackling various aspects of the problem, it was fragmented and largely women talking to women. By galvanizing the chairs and CEOs who were in the positions to make the desired change, we were able to help unite the ecosystem, elevate the conversation, and shine a spotlight on those leading by example. Since that time, the percent of female S&P 500 directors has doubled. This was my first experience seeing first-hand what business leaders can do when collectively committed to a shared goal.

The work we do at the Jobs Council is founded on the same key learnings: harnessing the power of the collective to build a workforce development and education system that works for all New Yorkers. This is another example of where the private sector is driving meaningful change.

## How do you describe the mission of New York Jobs CEO Council?

We like to say that our job is to make it easier for every New Yorker to "make it." New York City is home to some of the largest employers in the world and a huge workforce, and yet many New Yorkers remain stuck in low-paying jobs and many recent graduates struggle to navigate the labor market. We are founded and funded by some of our country's most influential CEOs – including Jamie Dimon, Sundar Pichai, Julie Sweet, and Arvind Krishna. As CEOs of companies with a long-standing commitment to New York City and its residents, they understand the importance of education institutions working in partnership with industry to prepare our local workforce. Everything we do is market driven – we focus on in-demand jobs and the skills and pathways connected to those careers and build

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public-private partnerships to scale proof points and fill in gaps. Our biggest partner is the City University of New York (CUNY), which is made up of 25 public colleges and serves as our city’s primary engine for social mobility. We also work with New York City Public Schools to help high schools embed career-connected exposure and learning at early ages.

The data supports that removing barriers surrounding access to information and skills training produces successful hiring outcomes. Our 27 member companies have hired 52,000 low-income New Yorkers into living-wage jobs at their companies over the past four years, including nearly 10,000 recent CUNY graduates.

**What excited you about the opportunity to lead New York Jobs CEO Council?**

The COVID-19 pandemic really drove home for me the systemic lack of access faced by too many New Yorkers. Social and economic factors led to disparities in how our communities experienced COVID-19 and highlighted long-standing systemic inequities. At the root of most access gaps – whether it be housing, education, or healthcare – is income. There is a national narrative about education being the great equalizer, but in New York City and many other places, good jobs are the great equalizer. The assumption that education puts you on an onramp to a good career and social mobility just doesn’t hold up anymore. Education has an incredibly critical role in preparing students for good jobs – but to solve for this, it has to start with a market-driven approach looking at the jobs that bring economic mobility, the skills required to get those jobs, and how to

democratize access to these skills, including through traditional education pathways. So, I was compelled by the opportunity to bridge the gap between some of the world’s largest employers and the 250,000 public university students being educated in their backyard.

**The Council recently reached a milestone of hiring over 50,000 New Yorkers. Will you highlight the impact the Council is having on New York, as well as on the broader national conversation on economic mobility?**

We’re building a blueprint for sustainable, systemic change. Too often, workforce solutions are built in silos outside of existing systems and focused on quick wins that aren’t scalable – rather than putting in the hard work of changing a system. This isn’t about charity; it’s about change. Our country’s education system isn’t historically built with a connection to business, and this is what we’re changing. But systemic change is hard – and doesn’t happen overnight. The commitment from the private sector is the catalyst here – the private sector is able to execute and iterate faster than the public sector in many ways. This is a great way to fund and identify proof points that can then be scaled using public resources.

New York is not the only city struggling to ensure its future workforce is skilled, competitive and ready to meet the rapidly changing needs of industry. This is a national problem – although the specific jobs and sectors may differ. Last year we convened similar regional collaboratives from around the country to compare notes and learn how others are effectively bridging the gap between business and education to ensure that the

skills students are learning in the classroom reflect the skills employers value.

**Collaboration with CEOs is critical for the Jobs Council’s work. How does the organization work with the nearly three dozen CEOs of member companies?**

Four years ago, our member companies set a ten year, 100,000 hiring target to hold themselves accountable – and while we’re halfway there, our member companies contribute far more than jobs. They are redesigning curriculum, providing free skills training, connecting career service teams to recruiting resources, and offering transparency into both the jobs they need today and those they’ll need in the future. And most importantly, they serve as proof points themselves. If a training program enables a jobseeker to land a job at Amazon or Google, it should be able to meet the needs of small and mid-sized New York tech companies as well.

**What are your priorities for New York Jobs CEO Council as you look to the future?**

Systemic change doesn’t happen overnight. We must maintain momentum and focus on scaling the things that are working while also keeping an eye on what lies ahead. Artificial intelligence is fundamentally reshaping how we work and create value, and New York is on the forefront of this innovation. Technological revolutions favor the skilled, and it’s important that we use this moment as an opportunity to ensure that economic gains are felt by all New Yorkers. We’re invested in scaling AI literacy in public education, as this will be critical to any job in any industry. ●

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